



2019 DEAN'S REPORT

FROM PETER B. "BO" RUTLEDGE,
DEAN & HERMAN E. TALMADGE CHAIR OF LAW

The Power of a Community

Hope* is a first-generation college graduate. Raised by loving parents in a suburb of Atlanta, she earned high grades in college through grit and determination. This March, during the School of Law's admitted students' weekend, Assistant Dean Greg Roseboro (J.D.'87) and I met with Hope and her mother to offer her a Distinguished Law Fellowship, the school's most generous class of scholarship (akin to the undergraduate Foundation Fellowship). Tears flowed as mother and daughter shared their pent-up worries over how to afford law school. Shortly after the pair departed, an admissions recruiter happened upon the prospective student and her mother in a tearful huddle. Inquiring whether something was wrong, he was assured they were fine but asked if he could explain this scholarship to Hope's father. Quizzically, the recruiter looked around and asked if the father was nearby. "No," replied Hope's mother, pointing to her phone. "He's in Afghanistan. It's three in the morning there."

Hope is now completing her first semester of law school. She already has met with federal judges, law firm partners and government officials who will mentor her. She has bonded with classmates from around the world, and she is a familiar, friendly face to a team of faculty and administrators dedicated to her success. Hope's story and countless others attest to the power of the School of Law community to invest in the future leaders of our state and society.

Steadfast support of financial aid, the law school's highest priority during the Commit to Georgia Campaign, has been critical. In early 2015, long-time counselors like Kathelen V. Amos (J.D.'82) and Joel O. Wooten (J.D.'75) established the Challenge Fund, awakening fellow alums to the critical need for increased financial support. Soon thereafter, supporters like B. Lynn Chastain (J.D.'84), Gerald S. Tanenbaum (J.D.'70), Stacey Godfrey Evans (J.D.'03) and The John N. Goddard Foundation made catalytic investments to grow the school's endowed scholarship portfolio. More recently, numerous supporters like Kathelen Amos and the Daniel P. Amos Family Foundation, James R. "Jim" Borders (J.D.'88), Brian P. (J.D.'87) and Kim Cain, Kenneth M. "Ken" Henson Jr.

*Her name has been changed.



(J.D.'78), Joey M. (J.D.'78) and Ramona Loudermill, Marlan B. Wilbanks (J.D.'86) and many others made transformational investments in the school's future. Nancy E. Rafuse (J.D.'91) and G. Sanders Griffith III (J.D.'77) helped to fund our new "graduate assistant" program, matching financial aid with income-earning work opportunities during law school. The School of Law's new spendable scholarship program has already created 23 new scholarships. These include the Benham Scholars Program, named for Justice Robert Benham (J.D.'70) and started with seed funding from the UGA Office of President (and fellow alumnus) Jere W. Morehead (J.D.'80), which supports students with a demonstrated connection to legally underserved communities.

Thanks to these collective efforts, 70% of the 2019 entering class, including every first-generation college graduate, now receives financial aid. Thanks to James E. "Jim" Butler Jr. (J.D.'77), the Butler Commitment guarantees financial aid to every veteran who enrolls at the law school.

As the school's scholarship portfolio grows, it works to address other critical student needs. Recently, the law school piloted a program of "bar passage stipends" to help relieve the financial stress between graduation and the bar exam for some deserving students. These stipends allowed recipients like Cliffton, a 2019 graduate now working for the UGA general counsel, to focus on their studies and seek jobs that fit their desired career paths. **In summer 2019, 26 students received bar preparation stipends and 23 passed** (including Cliffton)! We also piloted a program to help purchase professional development attire at deeply discounted prices. One deserving second-year student, Briana (also a first-generation college graduate), said this support not only enabled her to purchase a matching suit (previously she had relied on "mix 'n match" outfits), it also gave her "inner confidence" as she interviewed for summer jobs. Summer support for government, judicial and public interest employment has grown. **This past summer, the school distributed \$132,000 in summer stipends, supporting 90 students.** Recipients included students like Charlie

Prepare. Connect. Lead.



Photos from top:

Alumna Nancy Rafuse (J.D.'91) (center) spent time with students (l. to r.) Katie Graham, Jessie Rankin, Andy Wilson and Hanna Kaufman at an on-campus gathering.

First-year student Roya Naghepour (left) talks with alumna Stacey Godfrey Evans (J.D.'03) at an event.

Third-year students John Lex Kenerly (left) and Addison Smith made history presenting oral arguments before the Georgia Supreme Court.

who used his Rural Justice Fellowship at a prosecutor's office where he learned not only how to present a case to a grand jury but also how a lawyer can help address the plague of methamphetamines tearing apart families and their communities.

Alongside student support, our 18 clinical and experiential learning programs advance our goal to provide first-rate legal training in service to state and society. **Since opening its doors last year, the Veterans Legal Clinic has secured results for veterans worth nearly a quarter-million dollars.** The Wilbanks CEASE clinic, the nation's first clinic dedicated to survivors of childhood sexual abuse, recently heard from one of its former students, Jonathan, who described how his training there prepared him to represent survivors of sex trafficking in his current law practice. The Appellate Litigation Clinic made history when two third-year students, John Lex Kenerly and Addison Smith, appeared before the Georgia Supreme Court on behalf of a Georgia taxpayer.

Also providing first-rate legal training, the law school's award-winning advocacy program continues to thrive. Two third-year students, Thomas Paris and Georgia Turner, won the Hulsey/Gambrell competition against Florida, keeping the coveted trophy in Athens. The National Moot Court team recently swept the regional rounds and is busily preparing for the national tournament.

Beyond these stories of individual impact, data demonstrate the progress toward our shared vision to be the nation's best return on investment in legal education. **Since 2013, the School of Law has reduced annual student borrowing from \$15.3 million to \$9.9 million. Last year, approximately 40% of our students did not borrow to finance their legal education (compared to 20% six years ago).** Meanwhile, the school continues to excel at bar passage, posting a 95% ultimate bar passage rate for the Class of 2017 and a **93.7% pass rate for first-time takers of the July 2019 Georgia bar**, achieving the state's highest pass rate for the sixth straight year. Employment figures tell a similar success story. **For each of the past two years, over 90% of our graduates obtained full-time, long-term "gold standard" jobs within 10 months of graduation**, and the Class of 2019, with your help, has a strong chance to achieve a 95% placement rate in such jobs.

To be sure, much work remains. We must continue to reduce our students' debt load. We must cement our financial commitment to first-generation college graduates. We must grow the cohort of Distinguished Law Fellows to its target of 18-21 recipients. We must make 25 graduate assistantships a permanent part of our financial aid model. We must ensure that the commitment to programs like the Benham Scholars never diminishes.

Nonetheless, as we enter the holiday season, take pride in what your community has accomplished since 2015. Remember the indispensable role you can play – whether mentoring students like Hope, hiring students like Briana or financially supporting students like Cliffton.

Stories like theirs provide daily reminders of the power of our community in the lives of our students – and their families: Later this month, after eight years of near-uninterrupted service for a military contractor in Afghanistan, confident that his daughter's education will be paid for, Hope's father can decide to return home.

Thanks for all you do.